

Lessons Learned in Creating Walkable Communities Through Planning and Zoning

Jamie F. Chriqui, PhD, MHS

Professor and Director-MPH Program, Division of Health Policy and Administration
Co-Director, Health Policy Center and Fellow, Institute for Health Research and Policy
School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago

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Research Objective:

Understand the implementation of pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions and identify key recommendations and lessons learned

Why Focus on Zoning?

- Zoning
 - Determines land use and community character
 - Key regulatory tool in creating pedestrian-friendly & walkable communities
 - Pedestrian-oriented zoning serves to combat
 - Unsafe pedestrian conditions, urban sprawl, and disinvestment
 - New Urbanist zoning
 - ❖ Transit- and pedestrian-oriented development, transects, form-based codes

Methods

Jurisdiction Selection

- Sixteen small to mid-sized communities included in larger NIH R01 grant
- Mix of urban and rural densities
- Containing elements of pedestrian-oriented zoning that support community walkability, particularly New Urbanist zoning (pedestrian-oriented by design).

Study Sites

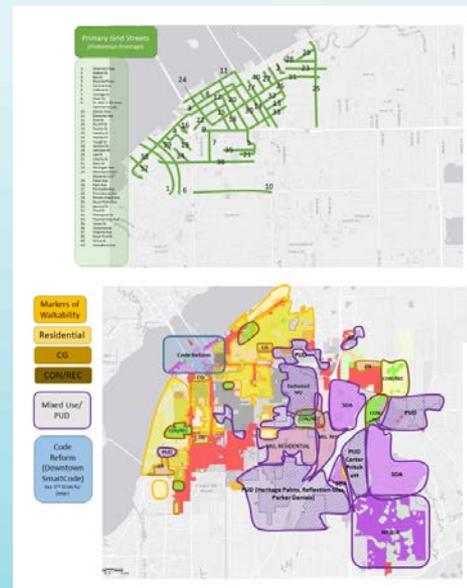


Methods - Study Sites

Jurisdiction	Pop Size	MHH Income	% White	% Black	% Hispanic
Blue Springs, MO	54,036	\$68,258	84.4	8.1	5.4
Bowie, MD/PG County	58,290	\$108,637	36.3	53.2	6.9
Davie, FL	101,543	\$64,170	75.5	9.2	36.8
Dorchester County, SC	151,716	\$58,685	67.9	25.7	5.0
Dunwoody, GA	48,857	\$87,252	67.8	13.2	9.3
Fort Myers, FL	73,712	\$41,591	63.9	26.2	22.7
Franklin, TN	72,990	\$92,589	85.5	5.9	7.0
Greensboro, NC	269,666	\$44,978	48.0	41.8	7.3
Gulf Shores, AL	11,358	\$50,227	97.2	0.3	3.3
Irving, TX	235,648	\$58,196	53.4	13.3	42.1
Lafayette, LA	126,476	\$48,533	63.5	31.7	4.1
Margate, FL	57,046	\$43,782	61.3	28.0	25.6
Miami, FL	399,457	\$33,999	75.4	18.4	72.2
North Richland Hills, TX	69,039	\$65,340	82.3	5.5	17.3
Oakland Park, FL	44,085	\$48,390	57.8	28.0	28.5
Rock Hill, SC	70,764	\$44,296	53.6	39.0	5.1

Documentary Research and Interview Recruitment

- Development of Interview Guide
 - Analysis of comprehensive plans, master plans, land use regulations, zoning ordinances
 - Creation of zoning and markers of walkability maps
- Key Informants (n=18; 3 in 1 jurisdiction)
 - Directors or managers of planning, community development, zoning, and/or building departments



Zoning/Planning Updates

The City of Fort Myers Comprehensive Plan was most recently amended in June of 2017 to allow for greater densities and intensities for developments; there seemed to have been a mismatch between proposed developments for Downtown and what was permitted under the previous Comprehensive Plan. The Downtown SmartCode Fort Myers Plan was adopted in 2003, revised in 2010, and included in the Comprehensive Plan and later transitioned into the city's zoning map. Within the Downtown plan, there is recurrent terminology around "New Urbanist Principles." The Downtown Plan outlines the distinctions between the U-CORE, U-CTR, and U-GEN divisions noted in map 2.

One of the objectives in the Comprehensive Plan is to expand housing by a net increase of 12,000-14,000 by 2030. Of the added units, 52.5% should be multi-family housing, illustrating the desire to increase density while increasing population.

In the Comprehensive Plan, under the housing objective, there is a policy which addresses displacement due to increased development: "persons displaced as a result of redevelopment projects or code enforcement shall be provided services which will ensure that they are not unduly inconvenienced by their relocation." According to this policy, those displaced by redevelopment shall receive priority in obtaining public housing.

A new project, "Fort Myers Integrated Downtown Redevelopment Strategy" has been proposed to develop a strategy for future growth relating to urban design, regulatory revisions, and long-range planning for the Downtown and Midtown districts. It seems like this is a very new project as plan presentations are occurring this week (August 20, 2018).

Questions for Planning Official(s)

1. Please tell me about your role in Fort Myers and how long you have been with the planning department in your current position?
2. Our research has shown us that Fort Myers contains elements of pedestrian-oriented zoning. Some examples include the Downtown SmartCode Redevelopment Area, Planned Developments and Special Development Areas, Pedestrian Frontage Streets, Mixed-use Developments, the Master Development Plan located on the southeast corner of the town. We also noted that Residential and Commercial Districts permit bike-pedestrian trails and encourage active and/or passive recreation. In addition to these pedestrian-oriented zoning elements, we found that Fort Myers has developed Complete Streets initiatives. Is this correct? Is there something we may have missed?
 - a. Is there a term that you prefer when discussing pedestrian-oriented zoning? New Urbanist Design, etc.?

Interviews and Analyses

- Telephone interviews lasted 30-45 minutes; digitally recorded and professionally transcribed
- Development of coding scheme from interview transcripts
- Testing of code scheme
- Coding in Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software
- Analysis of trends

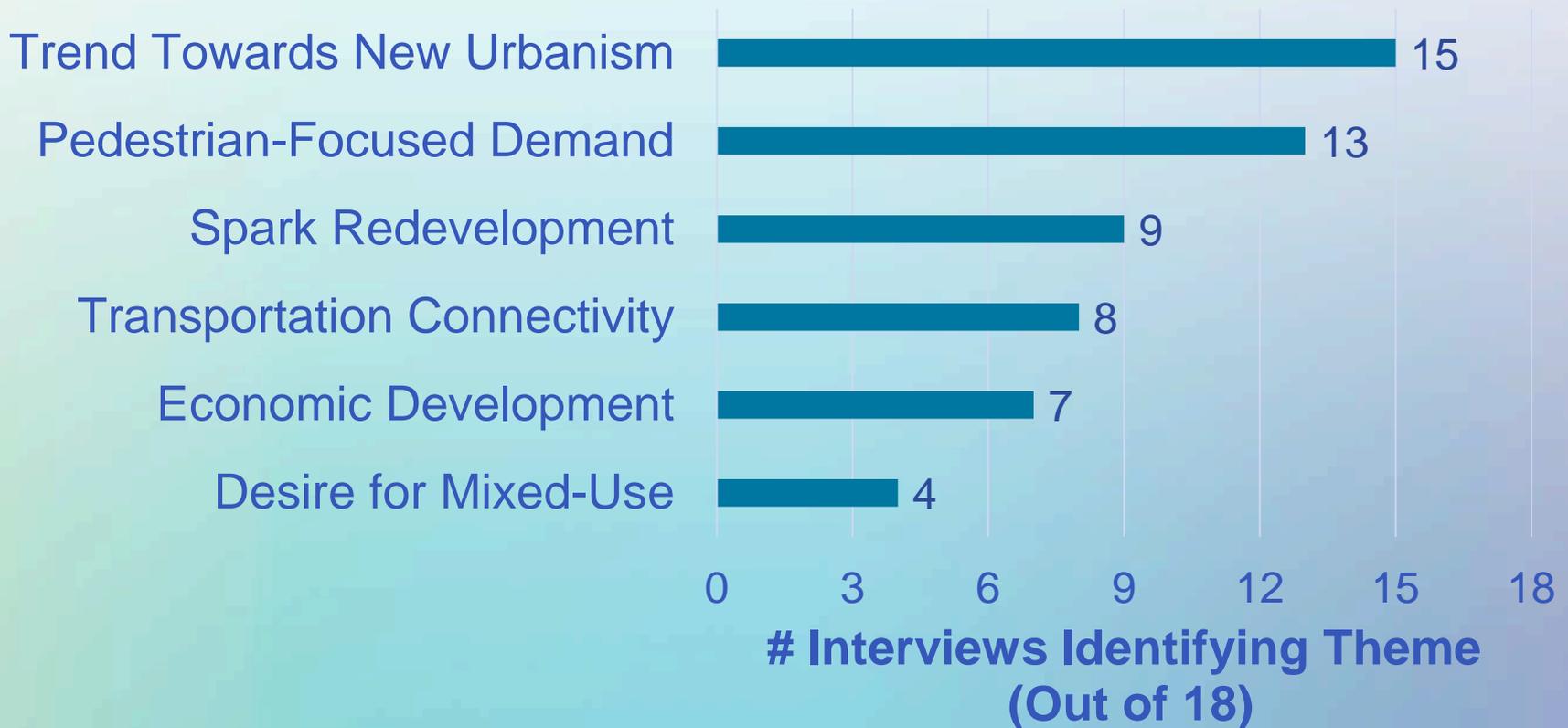
Results

Primary Themes

- Catalyst for pedestrian-oriented zoning adoption and implementation
- Benefits after implementing
- Barriers to implementation
- Lessons learned
- Actors in implementation

Results

Primary Catalyst for Pedestrian-Oriented Zoning



Primary Catalysts

■ Trends Towards New Urbanism

- “The county wanted to take a direction that as it grew, it wanted to **grow as responsible as it could** and create new neighborhoods that are less auto-oriented and more pedestrian.... putting schools in these neighborhoods, putting grocery stores in these neighborhoods that people can walk to or bike to, or once they get home and park their car, they don't have to go out on the main roads again.”
- “That was really an item in our [comprehensive] plan...to look at how can we take these underutilized areas of our perimeter area and **redevelop those into higher density mixed use developments that will essentially create walkability.**”

Primary Catalyst

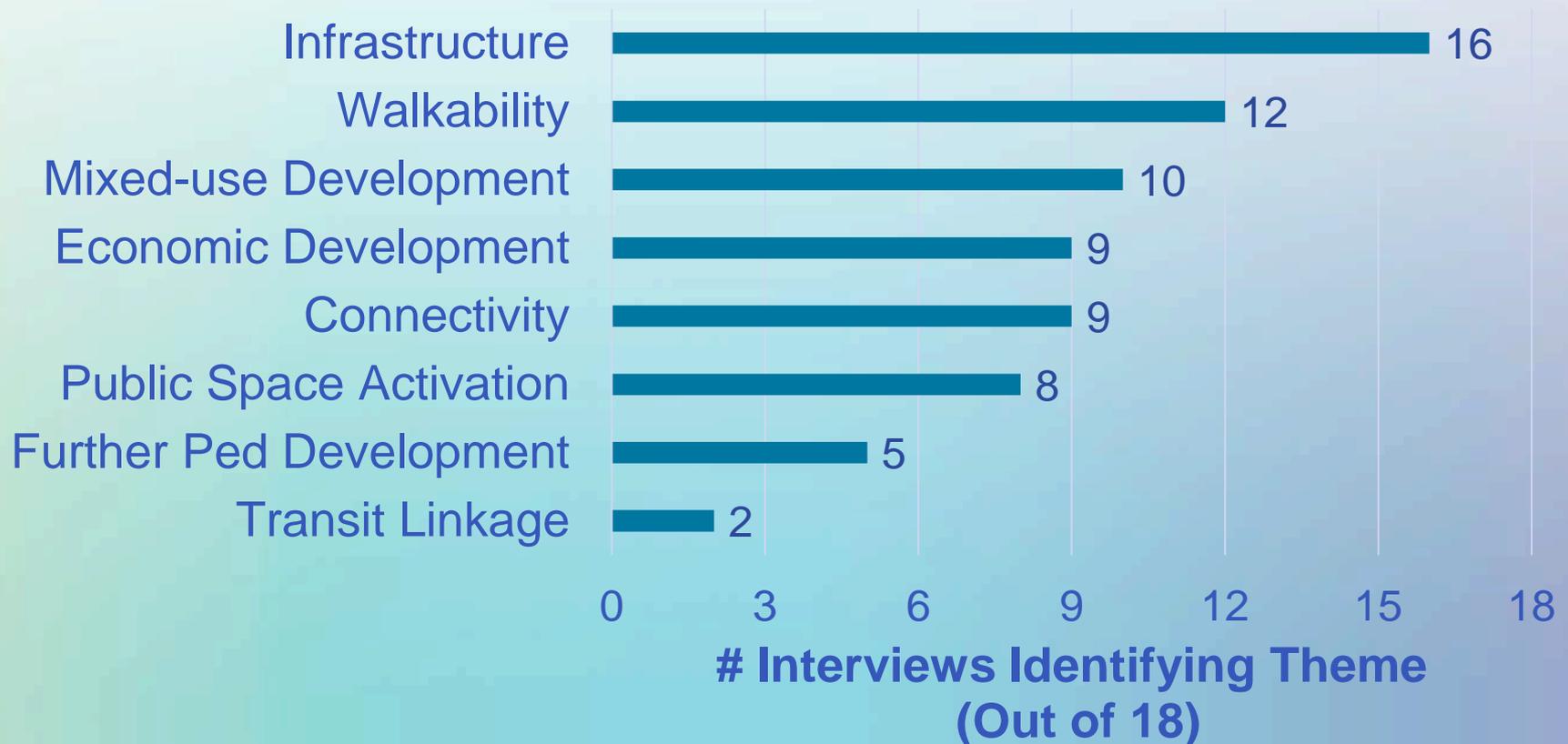
- Pedestrian-focused demand
 - “All of our council sees it, they hear it from our residents that they want to have more of a walkable community...we heard it time and time again that they **want their community to be even more bikeable, bike friendly and walkable as well.**”

Primary Catalyst

- Spark redevelopment
 - “We had a redevelopment plan along the corridors. We were trying to figure out how to capitalize on another university...We looked around at different types of ordinances [and] found a couple of models for pedestrian-scale overlay, and so **we first used it for a redevelopment area.**”
 - “There wasn't really a lot going on [at this location]. We developed this **plan to promote this area to be redeveloped in a very pedestrian friendly** fashion so **it could become a secondary tourist destination** which would compliment our beachfront.”

Results

Primary Benefits after Implementing Pedestrian-Oriented Zoning



Primary Benefit

■ Infrastructure

- “I think the streetscaping standards are important. We've created essentially complete streets so any new road or existing road that's getting improvement they have to put in a bike lane with a grass strip and then a 12 foot sidewalk... it's amazing because we've been a city for 10 years now and we've created several bike lanes along the roads and added several sidewalks. **A lot of these neighborhoods didn't have sidewalks. I think that's been an enormous success.**”
- “In addition to developing the regulations, we also **redeveloped one of the streets [with] eight or ten foot wide brick paved sidewalks, put on street parking in, pedestrian scale lighting, benches, and bike racks.**”

Primary Benefit

■ Walkability

- “I think our downtown smart code has been a phenomenal success...It really helped us **create a kind of a community living room**, if you will. The downtown is where everybody now comes, and they have the events there...they come downtown and that's where they can interact with the water and [they're] walking from their communities.”
- “And West Haven [a pedestrian-oriented zoned community] has an elementary school in the neighborhood... there are so many kids that walk, and ride their bikes there. **They had to go from one bike rack [to] three or four because of the massive amounts of bikes parked there every day.**”
- “It's just a **night and day difference** of...**more people wanting to walk on the street**, and not necessarily get in their car.”

Primary Benefit

■ Connectivity

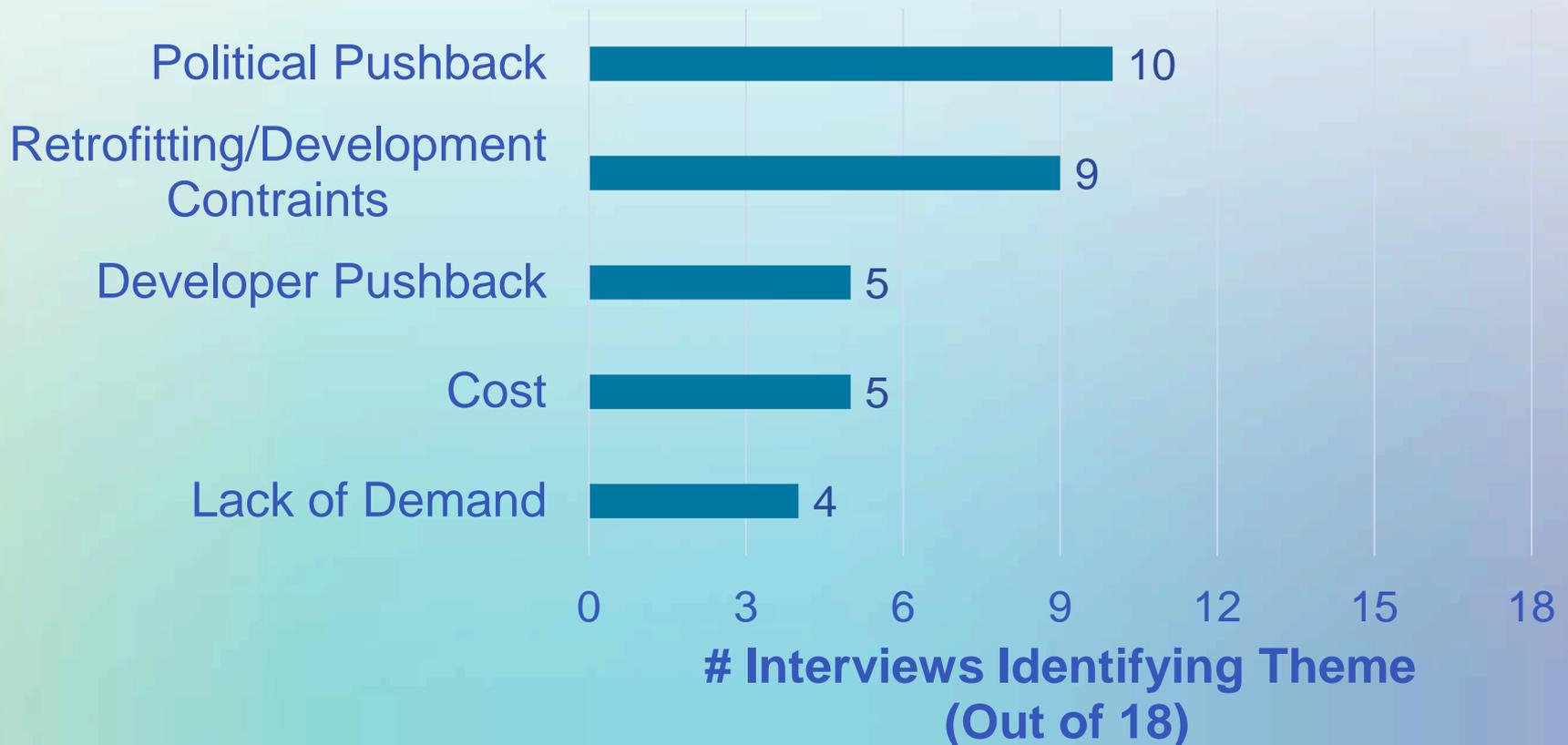
- “Even if they're not mixed use developments, or in the downtown area, we have seen kind of on the outskirts of the community, some of our new developments with **our new development standards...require certain open space provisions...**a lot of developers are installing trails through their developments, and we hope that with that as those subdivisions develop, **those trails will hook onto the next subdivision's trail** and then we'll have kind of a nice trail connection.”
- “Now basically you have a trail that extends from Racetrack Road in the Levitt or the old part of Bowie all the way out to Seabrook, which is seven or eight miles and it's a continuous trail facility...It's kind of **a spine that all these smaller neighborhood trails can feed into.**”

Primary Benefit

■ Economic Development

- “I've also heard from two or three business owners, for example one of them told me at spring break...“I've never had as much walk up traffic as I've had this year.” Another one said, **‘my business had increased threefold because of these new sidewalks.’**”
- “Before the changes there were maybe four restaurants. Now we have 15 or 20... **it’s been transformational for our downtown.**”
- “The tax value of the 10 acres of land that was redevelopment land when the plan was completed in 1995 was less than half a million dollars. That tax value ... the last time we looked was in 2015, was something over **65 million dollars.**”

Primary Barriers to Implementing Pedestrian-Oriented Zoning



Primary Barrier

■ Political Pushback

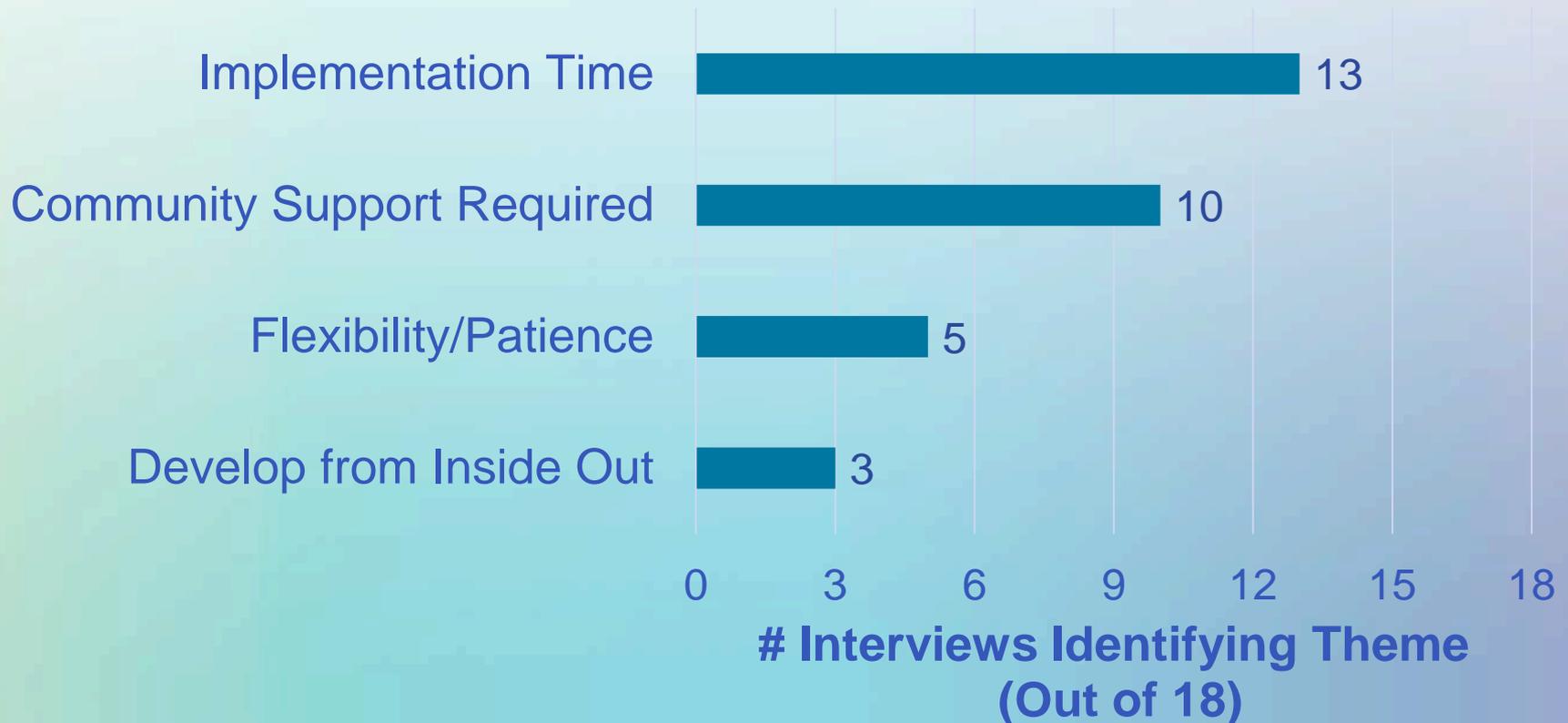
- “[Planning is] something that's newer for [the community] here, **it's a very property rights-driven geography**. So we deal with those challenges every day but as a planner we go into it knowing that. That's just part of our daily work.”
- **“People that don't like change**. Unfortunately that comes from some of the older folk, the long time residents and they're the ones that show up to the meetings.”
- “The conflict is common, I'm sure, in every city across the country is when it gets down to exactly **where those trails are placed**. There is oftentimes opposition in putting it in someone's backyard, or near their house. All the data reflects the opposite, that it increases property value and all of that. **The fears of crime, and other people walking near their house often comes out in public meetings.**”

Primary Barrier

- **Retrofitting/development constraints**
 - **“Connectivity was an afterthought** in [the metropolitan region] and planners are kind of stuck. You got an area that's built out and it's very difficult plow roads through neighborhoods and it's unfortunate.”
 - “The problem we have is that we're an old city that's **predominantly already built out** so retrofitting just takes time.”

Results

Lessons Learned from Implementing Pedestrian-Oriented Zoning



Primary Lesson Learned

- **Implementation Time**
 - “It took 20 years to get to this point. Maybe more, in fact, if you talk about the original vision.”
 - “Like any kind of comprehensive plan, it's usually long range and **takes awhile to really change the picture.**”
 - “[It takes a] long time, long time...The community should **have a 20 to 30 year horizon on some of these projects.**”

Primary Lesson Learned

- **Community Support Required**
 - “[Make] sure you really do **have good community dialog and dialogue with stakeholders** on those efforts. It's very, very important not only for them to understand what the goals and the principles are of transitioning the city to this type of code, but also to **hear from them on what some of their challenges are with development, so that those challenges can be addressed in the new code.**”
 - “I think a large part of our success is really due to working with the business owners, and the stakeholders because **they're the ones that really do a lot of the leg work...**we can put a sidewalk in, we can fix their utilities, but they're the ones that really stepped up...to create activities. **That's was really the catalyst for getting people used to coming back downtown which had been dead for years, if not decades.** So, it's just really a committed public-private partnership.”

Primary Lesson Learned

- Flexibility/patience
 - “Be realistic, be flexible, respond to the market.”
 - “It's not just time and patience. It's also the ability to know when **it's okay to change gears and change the plan**. It's not just having the plan and sticking to it. It's also, equally, when is it time to change the plan?”

Actors in Implementation

- Governmental departments
 - Planning, zoning, engineering, transportation, public health, public works
- Developer community
- Community advisory groups
 - Cycling groups, business improvement
- Residents
- Elected officials
- Business community
- Chambers of commerce

Conclusions and Next Steps

■ Conclusions

- Zoning is a powerful regulatory tool for use by communities seeking to create more walkable communities
- Consider examining New Urbanist types of zoning (even if for small areas of a community) as a starting point for rezoning and redevelopment projects/overlays
- Recognize that implementation takes TIME

■ Next Steps

- Community Profiles
- Manuscript and research brief
- Webinar

Blog Post

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Zoning in on Walkability: How Land Use Regulations Foster More Pedestrian-Friendly Communities

Posted by **Ashey Reimann** in **Physical Activity, Policy, Research.**



Within the last few decades, communities have begun to prioritize pedestrian safety and the human experience by integrating **New Urbanist** principles into their zoning and land use codes.

Combating car-centric and disjointed development patterns of the past, New Urbanist zoning serves as a pedestrian-oriented alternative by promoting walkable streets and engaging public spaces. These development patterns mimic the vibrant Main Streets of America before the explosion of the post-WWII suburb. Residents can once again access daily groceries, entertainment, schools, and parks all within walking distance.

New Urbanist design developments typically have more than one use (e.g. housing and retail), feature bike lanes and parking racks, and access to green space to foster walkable communities. Similarly, many communities are implementing **transit-oriented districts or developments (TODs)**, which are compact, higher-density developments near transit stops and include a mixture of uses such as residential, commercial, and employment opportunities. These developments promote transit use and walkability while reducing reliance on cars.

Dr. Jamie Chriqui, co-leader of the Illinois PRC **Physical Activity Policy Research Network Plus (PAPRN+) Collaborating Center**, and her team are exploring the implementation of New Urbanist principals in local zoning and land use regulations. Through interviews with local planners in fifteen jurisdictions with New Urbanist zoning provisions, Dr. Chriqui and her research team will determine best practices and lessons learned for adopting and implementing New Urbanist and pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions for community walkability.

For More Information

Jamie F. Chriqui
jchriqui@uic.edu



@jfchriqui